

HISTORY OF CAMAS CEMETERY COVERS MORE THAN 80 YEARS

By WINNIE SHINN

As Memorial Day, Monday, May 30, once more brings a profusion of blooms and visitors to the Camas Cemetery, a review of its history, and credit for its ordered beauty is of interest.

Through the continuing dedicated interest and effort of the Camas Cemetery Association, a non-profit business organization entirely separated from the city administration, the park-like cemetery is cared for, planned, and administered as an asset to the community.

Located north of Evergreen Terrace and east of the high school, with its main entrance on N. E. Oak just above 8th, the cemetery has recently been enlarged by a section reaching north to Lacamas Creek which has been deeded to the association by Crown Zellerbach Corporation, insuring adequate space for another one hundred years.

Present officers of the Association, which was first incorporated in 1921, are C. B. "Casey" O'Dell, president; Archie Hewitt, vice-president; and Mrs. Lois Savage, secretary-treasurer. Other board members are Lonnie Belz, Bige Smith, Mrs. Clona Thayer, Mrs. Florence Summers, Mrs. William Harris, and Dewey Fair. The able caretaker is Charles Gates.

Anyone owning a lot in the cemetery is automatically a member of the association and should participate. There are close to three thousand graves, but participating members number around two hundred. Active members, who attend the annual meeting, are less than thirty.

PLATTED IN 1885

The original cemetery was platted about 1885 by the Camas Colony Company, being laid out on a very intricate and beautiful plan, but the stakes were not permanent and the plat itself was finally lost.

The earliest tombstones are dated in the late 1800's and it is thought that the land, which was "way out in the woods" was originally owned by a man named Stearns.

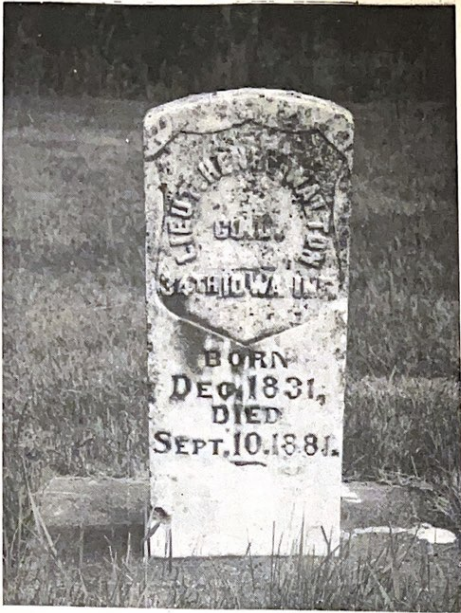
A deed for the property to the city of Camas from the Pittock and Leadbetter families is recorded on March 14, 1914.

According to Mrs. Edith O'Dell, officer and board member for many years, the Women's Civic Club around 1910 took on the cemetery as a project and handled its affairs until 1914 when it was turned over to the city. It was then administered by city officials until 1920 when the present Camas Cemetery Association was formed.

ENDOWMENT GROWS

The endowment care fund, started at that time with \$400, has now grown to over \$26,000. The association is worth about \$32,000 and is currently operating in the black, a change from the times when bills were paid "when the money

Civil War Veteran



ONE OF THE OLDEST HEADSTONES in the Camas cemetery is this one reading "Lieut. Henry Walton, Co. O, 34th Iowa Infantry." Lieut. Walton was born in 1831 and died in 1881. Many other stones have similar early dates. This one is located next to the small red brick building at the east end of the grounds.

came in", and when the Sexton once went eight months with no pay.

B. M. Faler was the first paid sexton at a salary of \$10 a month. Others have been Mr. Mitchell, George Purrier, Doc David, three Barrett brothers, J. E. Dailley, Ben Rekdahl, Mr. Ramsey, and others.

Care of the grounds and digging the graves have been mechanized in recent years so that there is little hand labor, eliminating much of the hard work. A private backhoe operator digs a grave (about 60 a year) in about an hour, and cooperates with the association by working before breakfast or after dark if necessary.

NEW EQUIPMENT

A large riding mower has simplified grass cutting, although there is more to mow, and there is also available a small tractor equipped to trim around the headstones.

The complete sprinkling system, installed since 1960, consists of four-inch main lines, and sprinkler heads that each cover an 80-foot circular area. Cost of the equipment was \$3,000 (wholesale price) and donated labor equalled that amount. Biggest donor was Lonnie Belz who "fathered" the project, and is justifiably proud of it.

Dedicated members like Mr. Belz, who served as president from 1953-1957, include Edith O'Dell who was secretary at that time; her husband Casey, who was greatly responsible for the additional acreage recently acquired from Crown Zellerbach (the third piece of land from the paper company); Charlie Farrell one of the first presidents and donor of many rose bushes and shrubs; Mrs. Lois Savage who has served on the

board since 1953; William Crawford, a native of Camas now of Portland whose wife Maud was buried here last month, and who donated money to build the fieldhouse in 1940 and pave the roads in 1944; Herbert Duvall who gave property;

George Purrier who laid the first 1/2-inch water line in 1928 and a 2-inch line in 1931; Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Beltz who deeded adjoining land; and many others, J. D. Currie, O. F. Johnson, Hugh McMaster the first president, Jack Mitchell, F. W. Wright, Mrs. Alice Tidland, J. J. Harrington, Tillie Baumann, Wilmer Swank and Jim Reilly.

NEIGHBORS HELP

The cooperation of city

officials, neighbors in the area, (Frank Mandic, Frank Dowdy, Doctor Abram A. Dyck helped plant the flowering trees), and lots of other volunteer help on many occasions, plus the dedicated interest of the active members, has kept the Camas Cemetery a spot of beauty conducive to serene meditation by visitors.

It was not always so. Grass was once overgrown, fences toppled and one old report requests that the road, "littered by unthinking persons", be cleaned up.

Adding to the beauty now are the \$400 worth of Pyramidalis trees recently planted along the west side to screen the high school track and stadium.

Roads in the cemetery, which is unofficially divided into the "old" and the "new" sections, are named Cypress, Hazel, Elm, Crawford, Duvall avenues, and Laurel Court and North Court. A part of the new section has been set aside for infants.

PRICES INCREASE

Inflation has raised the price of lots from an original \$10 in 1920 to \$85 each in 1966, 25% of which goes to the endowment fund for perpetual care.

Still standing is a small mausoleum originally built by Mr. Stearns for his wife, but later, on her removal, used as rest rooms, and now used for storage.

Camas Cemetery Recalls Early Days



MUCH OF THE BEAUTY of the Camas cemetery is due to the tall evergreens, the flowering shrubs and the well-kept appearance. The view above is looking toward the southeast corner, a part of the older section where the tombstones are large and some more ornate. In the new sections headstones must be level with the ground which facilitates mowing and gives a more park-like appearance. Burials now average 60 a year.

Services on Memorial Day will be held near the Spanish War Veterans monument which was erected by Tom Woolson about ten years ago.

Flowers will cover the area, brought to the cemetery by thoughtful relatives and friends, but on the first day of June all plastic flowers will be prohibited until Fall. The wire stems are not good for the mower.

A stroll through the headstones reveals many familiar names, many pioneers involved with the history of this area.

The Camas Cemetery, a place of beauty, is also a place for reverie and reverence.

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